**Family Service Talk 11th February 2024**

**Luke 12:13-21**

***13Someone in the crowd said to him, “Teacher, tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me.” 14Jesus replied, “Man, who appointed me a judge or an arbiter between you?” 15Then he said to them, “Watch out! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; life does not consist in an abundance of possessions.” 16And he told them this parable: “The ground of a certain rich man yielded an abundant harvest. 17He thought to himself, ‘What shall I do? I have no place to store my crops.’ 18“Then he said, ‘This is what I’ll do. I will tear down my barns and build bigger ones, and there I will store my surplus grain. 19And I’ll say to myself, “You have plenty of grain laid up for many years. Take life easy; eat, drink and be merry.”’ 20“But God said to him, ‘You fool! This very night your life will be demanded from you. Then who will get what you have prepared for yourself?’ 21“This is how it will be with whoever stores up things for themselves but is not rich toward God.”***

How many of us here this morning have always lived in the same house? For many of us, even if we have moved at some point, it was maybe a long time ago and in the time in our present house, it is incredible how many ‘things’ we have accumulated. Depending on your age they may be buckets of brightly coloured soft toys, boxes of Lego or much loved but half broken precious toys. Or maybe for another generation they may be boxes of records, cassettes and cds all of which have been replaced in their time as the favoured way of listening to music. Attached to the walls might be bookcases full of many much-loved books that we have read but just as many that have been waiting for years for the diary to produce an empty day with the opportunity to just ‘sit and read’. And certainly, in the kitchen we may have at least one cupboard of barely used ‘helpful’ gadgets that we might one day need. We all have so many ‘things’ around us – and that is even before we open the hatch to the loft to see the letters and mementoes from times past that we are looking forward to looking at one rainy day.

One of the hardest things when someone dies is sorting through their possessions. All the ‘things’ that they have accumulated over many years are simply left behind and are of no use to them. Even the things that have been much loved and much used in life are no longer of value. These things may hold many memories for us as we sort them out and we are then of course tempted to keep them too to add to the boxes in the loft for our children to sort at some point further down the road. And it may be that there is very good reason to keep some of these ‘things’ but, in the reading, Jesus is alerting his listeners to the dangers that having lots of ‘things’ can bring. He reminds them that there is more to life than that.

Let’s go back to the beginning of the reading …. A man in the crowd asks Jesus to sort out a problem for him. If we go back to the start of chapter 12, we discover that this man was part of a crowd of many thousands who was listening to Jesus speaking to his disciples. There were so many, they were trampling on each other, it must have been quite a scene!

In that culture, the local Rabbi was seen as a learned person who was often called upon to arbitrate in disagreements or pronounce judgements in legal cases. Clearly the man who spoke to Jesus, assumed he was a rabbi and wanted him to tell his brother to share the inheritance fairly. Jesus was not a formally trained rabbi (though as God’s Son, totally superior to any earthly rabbi!) but he used the question to approach a much deeper and more vital eternal issue that he knew was at the bottom of why the man had made his request in the first place.

Jesus challenged all those around him …. ‘Watch out’, he said, ‘guard against all kinds of greed. The number of possessions you have is not what is important in life’. And he then went on to tell a parable to illustrate what he meant.

Before we look at the parable, let us think about what greed is …. What do you think it means? *Pause for answers.* One of the books I was looking at described it as ‘a desire for what we don’t have’; another said it was ‘an intense and selfish desire for more of something than is needed e.g. wealth, power, food.’ I can remember very clearly being told as child that it was very greedy to want more than one doughnut – though sadly it didn’t stop me liking doughnuts and wanting to have more than one at a time. (It also felt wrong that more than one Brussel sprout was not considered greedy, indeed was actively encouraged or even enforced!)

And in the parable, Jesus explained with great clarity why greed is wrong, and indeed pointless. It is not in the initial actions of the man … his land had produced a good crop and he found himself with nowhere to store it because there was so much of it. What a blessing that he had had a good harvest! We can even understand him building bigger barns to hold all the harvest so that it did not rot away in the fields – waste not, want not. What Jesus **was** asking his listeners to question, however, was the motive behind the actions – often an indicator of where a heart truly lies.

Did the man in the parable build bigger barns so that he could keep the crop there before giving it away to poor people as they needed it? Did he do it so that he could supply his family over the winter? There were many ways in which his action in building bigger barns and keeping all the surplus grain could be seen as a generous act of service to others,

However, we read that his motive was nothing like that and actually he **was** greedy and was going to keep it all for himself so that he could do nothing …. except eat, drink and be merry. His whole motivation was looking at himself and how much he could get out of it.

Jesus’ words however, showed the error of this way of thinking. He told the man that he would die that night and none of his crops or barns or any other possessions would be of any use to him at all. Because, of course, our possessions are only of use to us in this life. And, the desire to build more and more wealth and gather more and more ‘things’ now, may also, inevitably, take the focus away from what is most important – building a rich relationship with God and working in his service, preparing for the wonderful eternity to be spent in his glorious presence.

Jesus is not saying that having some wealth, food, power is necessarily wrong, but what matters most is how we are in our relationship with God …. because that will determine what we do with our possessions, wealth and food. If we use all the things that God has blessed us with to serve others and do the work that God has called us to, then it is clear that our heart truly lies in our relationship with God which will last for all eternity.

Sometimes though, we are too busy serving others to actually focus on the work God asks of us. There is a verse in John’s gospel that clearly describes what working for God is all about….

***John 6:28-29 ….*** *‘Then they asked him, “What must we do to do the work God requires?” Jesus answered,* ***“The work of God is this: to believe in the one he has sent.”***

**ALL** God asks of us is that we believe in Jesus …. Wow!

That’s not to say that it’s not good to support Christian charities, help in food banks, be on the church cleaning rota etc. They are all good things to do in service of God and his church. **BUT** the last verse in our reading underlines what is more important than anything else … than any wealth or multitude of possessions … is being rich towards God. And the most important part of being rich towards God is knowing him, having a relationship with him and putting our trust in him totally. That trust means that we will depend on God for all our needs rather than spending all our time, thoughts and energy making money and gathering things around us ‘just in case’ they are needed. God **knows** what we need and **will** provide it.

And therefore, it is the relationship that we have with Jesus as our Lord and Saviour that must be the focus of all that we do while we are on earth. We must, each one of us, today ask ourselves “is my relationship with Jesus at the centre of all that I do.” I suspect many of us would say it is what we aim for …. but don’t always succeed. The good news is that God **wants** us to have that relationship – it is the work he requires of us! He is on our side; he knows us; he loves us and wants to be known and loved by us! And he, by his Spirit, enables us to know Jesus now and through all eternity. Praise God! Amen.